

Zombies stalk the screen again in the long-awaited remake of George Romero's 1968 horror masterpiece, directed by make-up wizard Tom Savini. It's released on Tartan Video very soon, and we needed no further excuse to nominate it as this month's *Video World Classic*. Remember: shoot 'em in the brain and you can't go wrong...

It's all a little bit confusing. The ads promise that it's "All New, All Colour!" But it's *Night Of The Living Dead*, with George Romero's name worked into the title for good measure. How can these things be? The answer is that it's a colour remake of *NOTLD*, budgeted at \$8.4 million - modest bucks by today's standards, but 40 times what the original movie cost. It's the same, only different...

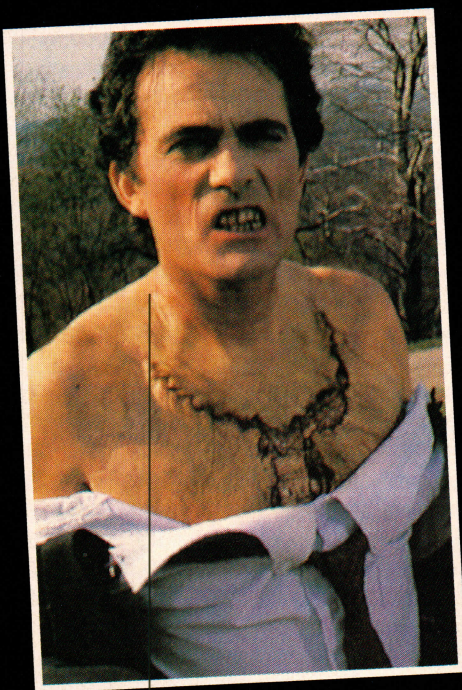
The 1990 version begins almost exactly as its predecessor: with a shot of a car driving along a winding, deserted road. An extended voiceover offers one of the original film's most memorable lines - "They're coming to get you, Barbara." It also establishes Barbara (Patricia Tallman) and Johnnie (Bill Mosley) as the squabbling siblings on their way to visit their mother's grave in an isolated cemetery.

At first it all seems like an elaborate homage to Romero's low-budget, creepy original, but of course it's not... not exactly. Directed by make-up artist Tom Savini, a longtime Romero collaborator who created the ground-breaking splatter effects for several Romero films, it soon becomes apparent that this *Night Of The Living Dead* is virtually a shot-by-shot recreation of the first film.

Barbara and Johnnie are attacked by men who behave very oddly. Johnny is killed and Barbara escapes to a nearby farmhouse, where she teams with Ben (Tony Todd), who tells her that the dead are rising from their graves as cannibal zombies. After seeing some of the walking dead up close, he realises she is right. They discover other people hiding in the cellar: bossy Harry Cooper (Tom Towles), his wife (McKee Anderson) and sick daughter (Heather Mazur), and a teenage couple, Tom (William Butler) and Judy Rose (Katie Finnerman). One by one, zombies gather outside as the besieged argue over the best way to proceed; Harry wants to barricade themselves in the basement, while Ben favours staying upstairs, where they will have a chance to run for it if the zombies

break in. Tom and Judy are killed in an abortive attempt to get petrol from a nearby pump. Harry's child dies, becomes a zombie and kills her mother, Ben and Harry fight, and Barbara strikes out to look for help...

The bleak ending of the original has been replaced by another, equally grim twist. But the primary difference between the original and this remake is that the latter is in colour - though it's a somewhat subdued colour at that! In



addition, the zombies created by Everett Burrell and John Vulich are far more elaborate than those in the first film.

Finally, an attempt has been made to add more depth to the characters, with Barbara undergoing the greatest transformation. In the original film the shock of seeing her brother killed leaves her almost catatonic, while in the remake she becomes the strongest of the characters trapped in the farmhouse. In most other respects, the 1990 version is so similar to the 1968 release as to be uncanny. As such it is an often very chill-

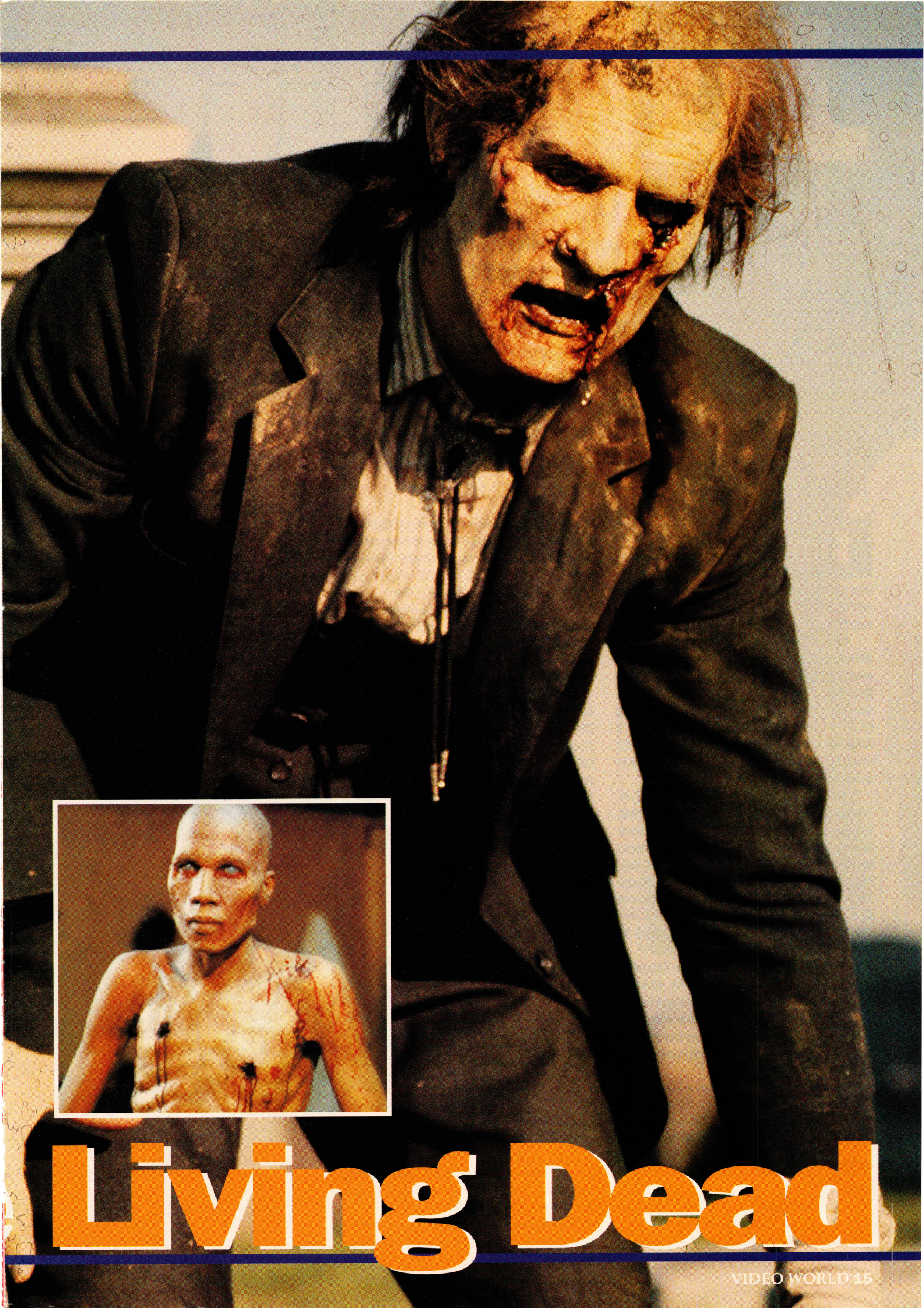
ing movie, even though it lacks the breakthrough quality of its macabre role model.

Given that the 1968 film was enormously popular and influential, the first question that springs to mind is, why did Romero bother to produce a virtual remake? The answer is largely one of economics. When he created the first film, Romero was a Pittsburgh advertising executive who was quite naive with respect to the movie business. He and his fellow investors neglected to properly copyright their movie, with the result that the film could be copied and sold without permission - without any profits going to investors. Moreover, it led to two films, Dan O'Bannon's *Return Of The Living Dead* (1985) and Ken Wiederhorn's *Return Of The Living Dead Part 2* (1987) which cashed in on the title even though Romero had no involvement in them. Romero did, however, create his own sequels, *Dawn Of The Dead* (1979) and *Day Of The Dead* (1985).

He has said he saw the 1990 remake as a way of compensating investors in the original film who missed out on the profits that the movie has generated over the years. The film marked Romero's first collaboration in years with the original investors John Russo (co-writer of the 1968 film), and Russell Streiner (Johnny in the 1968 movie). Romero wrote the new screenplay and served as executive producer while Russo and Streiner were given producer credits.

The movie industry routinely cannibalises itself anyway (a particularly apt metaphor in this instance), with remakes of old films, sequels, prequels and high-concept hybrids. So, given the reasons behind its production, it's hard to fault the second *Night Of The Living Dead* for being what it is, and we have no qualms about awarding it the ultimate accolade of *Video World Classic*. It has been three years looking for a UK distributor, but this month gets its long-awaited release on the Tartan label. Don't miss it, or it might come looking for you...

Night Of The



Living Dead

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